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ACTION AF-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AID-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	DODE-00	DS-00
	UTED-00	VC-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00	LAB-01	L-00
	VCE-00	AC-00	NSAE-00	OMB-00	NIMA-00	PA-00	PM-00
	GIWI-00	PRS-00	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	SSO-00	SS-00
	TRSE-00	FMP-00	IIP-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-00
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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1721
INFO SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS GABORONE 000243

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SENSITIVE

AF/S FOR DIFFILY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [BC](#)

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION PARTIES CONSIDER COOPERATION, AGAIN

REF (A) 04 Gaborone 1816 REF (B) 04 Gaborone 1606 REF (C) 04

Gaborone 1873 REF (D) Gaborone 56

1. (SBU) Summary: Energized by growth in their share of the popular vote in the October 2004 elections, Botswana's opposition parties are debating with renewed vigor how cooperation could embarrass, if not unseat, the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) in 2009. In order to achieve that objective, opposition leadership will have to demonstrate a quantum shift toward a more pro-active, practical style and map out a coherent strategy. Despite residual suspicious attitudes toward the U.S., the Mission will continue to reach out to opposition parties to cultivate more informed views on the U.S. and its policies in their growing ranks. End Summary.

OPPOSITION SUPPORT GROWING

2. (U) The results of the October 2004 elections have inspired opposition parties to re-examine the importance of solidarity with greater enthusiasm (Ref A). The Botswana National Front (BNF), the biggest opposition party, contested elections in partnership with the much smaller Botswana Alliance Movement (BAM) and Botswana People's Party (BPP). The BNF garnered 12 parliamentary seats, doubling its previous number; BAM and BPP did not win any. The Botswana Congress Party (BCP) lost its parliamentary seat from Okavango but gained one from the Gaborone Central constituency. Both the BNF and BCP significantly increased their numbers of local council members.

3. (U) Although opposition parties won less than a quarter of the seats in the National Assembly, they attracted 48 percent of the popular vote, up from 43 percent in 1999. In twelve constituencies, a BDP candidate won with less than half the vote, thanks to competition between opposition parties. In two more, the combined opposition vote fell short by fewer than 100 ballots. Both the BNF and the BCP have unanimously acknowledged the need for cooperation if they want to avoid, in the National Assembly of 2009, a recurrence of their disproportionate under-representation.

4. (SBU) The response to these facts and figures on the part of the ruling BDP has been mixed. Former party Executive Secretary and now specially-elected MP Botsalo Ntuanane downplayed the likelihood that the opposition parties will find a means to combine their support in the next election. In contrast, Ntuanane's successor as Executive Secretary, Batlang "Comma" Serema, asserted that the BDP is

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in danger of losing the government. MP and former cabinet minister Boyce Sebetela told the press "the numbers indicate that the opposition is taking power. The writing is on the wall." If, like Ntuanane, the BDP over-confidently dismisses the threat posed by a united opposition, it could find itself with a significantly diminished parliamentary caucus in five years.

EARLY SIGNS POSITIVE FOR OPPOSITION UNITY

15. (U) Initial indications of the likelihood that opposition parties will devise a means of cooperation are positive. Reports from Botswana Congress Party (BCP) internal consultative workshops in January suggest that the party leadership is leaning toward a pact-like arrangement with the other opposition parties. Ironically, the BCP declined to join a similar joint venture for the 2004 elections, arguing that the proposal emerged too late to act upon it. The BNF has reiterated the imperative of opposition unity and expressed its desire to work with the BCP. Some in the Botswana Alliance Movement have spoken in favor of merging all opposition groups into a single party. Such a merger would have to include the BNF and BCP to make an appreciable impact, but the BCP has already rejected the notion.

16. (U) Hard feelings between members of the BNF and BCP, stemming from their 1998 split, which contributed to their resounding defeat in the 1999 election, could impede attempts at unity. Competition for coveted positions at the local level, however, poses a greater threat. A senior leader in the BNF argued that shortsighted reluctance among council candidates to make way for their colleagues from other parties where the latter have an advantage could sink efforts to cooperate. In the recent election, the Pact failed to prevent incidents of such rebellion when it

consisted only of the BAM, BPP, and the much larger BNF. Adding the BCP, which actually contested more constituencies than did the BNF in 2004, would magnify this challenge. Given Botswana's relatively small political class, personalities and personality conflicts play a disproportionate role in national politics. Whether or not old grudges and unwillingness to make short-term sacrifices frustrate attempts to forge opposition unity hinges on the leadership within these parties.

CHARISMA, WHAT CHARISMA?

17. (SBU) Leaders within the two biggest opposition parties, the BNF and BCP, have an indifferent record of creating and exploiting opportunities to undermine support for the BDP. BNF Secretary General and leader of the opposition in parliament Akanyang Magama unwittingly but brilliantly captured part of this problem by stating in a February 7 interview "I don't know about this charisma that people are talking about." Former BNF leader Dr. Kenneth Koma, by contrast, largely built the party on his ability to move a crowd. Although the passing of Koma from the political scene has liberated the BNF from his personality cult and his ideological focus, the party's current leaders have not similarly aroused and inspired supporters.

18. (SBU) In a prior meeting with the Ambassador, Magama presented himself as a reserved party man with policy views heavily colored by outdated ideological debates. He failed to clearly outline his vision for Botswana and a strategy for expanding the BNF's support over the next five years. Although Magama was able to restore some order to the BNF, leadership with a different skill set, including crucial intangibles like charisma, would contribute powerfully to expanding the party's presence in BDP strongholds.

19. (U) The BNF's publicity secretary Mohammed Khan, who possesses some of these qualities, has announced his candidacy to replace Magama as party secretary general at its triennial congress in July. Khan, who narrowly lost to the BDP candidate in Molepolole North, has long played an important role in the BNF and may well defeat Magama.

110. (SBU) Otladisa Koosaleetse, President of the BCP, also lacks charisma. The BCP prides itself in reaching out to the disaffected youth of Botswana. Consequently, some argue that a younger candidate would more aptly fit the party's profile. Koosaleetse himself has recognized the importance of turning over the reins to a new generation within the party but indicated his willingness to remain president for another three-year term. If Koosaleetse were to make an early exit, however, it is not clear who would replace him. Therefore it seems likely that Koosaleetse will remain as President of the BCP for another three years and use that time to groom a cadre of younger leaders.

111. (SBU) The personal appeal of Vice President Khama puts the opposition leaders at a particular disadvantage. Although Khama is reserved and speaks only rough Setswana, his background projects an aura of leadership. Former Commander of the Botswana Defense Force, son of Botswana's first president and paramount chief of the Bamangwato, Khama fits the profile of a leader. Charismatic personalities such as the BNF's Robert Molefhabangwe and the BCP's Dumelang Saleshando do exist within the opposition. To

defeat the BDP, the opposition must develop such talent.

ATTACK BDP'S GOVERNANCE RECORD

112. (SBU) Opposition parties are already united in their assessment of the issues on which the BDP is vulnerable. Unemployment, poverty, unequal distribution of the benefits of growth, and lack of accountability were key themes of the 2004 campaign and will remain relevant during the next five years (Ref B). While opposition figures uniformly endorse Vision 2016, the GOB's development objectives for the nation's golden anniversary, they pillory the BDP for poor implementation. Ephraim Setshwaelo, leader in the Botswana Alliance Movement, articulated lack of transparency in policy formation as an issue of popular concern. He cited the uproar over the recently passed Abolition of Marital Powers Act, especially complaints that the Government rode roughshod over the House of Chiefs, ignored religious groups, and failed to build support among constituents. Setshwaelo depicted this incident as indicative of a growing

consensus that the BDP has taken its position of power for granted.

BDP RIFT A WINDFALL FOR OPPOSITION?

113. (SBU) A third prong of opposition parties' nebulous strategy for 2009 is to exploit the factional fighting within the BDP. The BDP has never been as divided as it is today (Refs C and D). A leading light of the BCP told PolOff that the opposition parties are in contact with the disaffected members of the BDP and are positioning themselves to woo potential defectors. Their ability to do this will rest on their success in forming a common front and effectively mobilizing public discontent. Open speculation by BDP Secretary General Daniel Kwelagobe about the possibility of a resurgent opposition and a breakaway faction of the BDP combining forces to dislodge the ruling party suggests that this strategy is not unrealistic.

IMPLICATIONS FOR US INTERESTS

114. (U) An ascendant opposition likely has no significant negative impact on U.S. interests in Botswana. Some BNF leaders have publicly criticized the U.S. for its role -- or lack thereof -- in the Israel-Palestine conflict, the war in Iraq, and the U.S.' alleged domination of the UN, but many within the BDP share the same misgivings. More significantly, the socialist ideological background of the BNF, and its spin-off party, the BCP, is gradually receding. Whereas the BNF previously rejected privatization of state-owned enterprises outright, they now recognize that privatization and foreign direct investment have a role to play in development. In short, the opposition parties have come to terms with the changing world since 1989.

INSTITUTIONAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

115. (U) Certain institutional and demographic factors beyond the control of the opposition parties have a significant impact on their prospects in the medium to long term. The campaign finance regime and first-past-the-post system of representation favor the BDP. Although opposition parties routinely assail this practice as unfair and undemocratic, it is unlikely to change soon. But demographic factors, particularly migration from rural to urban areas and the gradual passing of the generation old enough to vote in the early post-independence period, favor the opposition. These trends mark the end of the BDP's extended holiday in power and the beginning of an era in which the BDP will have to earn each vote.

COMMENT

116. (SBU) Continued growth in support for opposition parties will fundamentally transform the role of opposition leaders. Previously, these individuals acted as gadflies to the government, ever vigilant to condemn policy mistakes, maladministration and corruption but not necessarily bound to identify and advance development solutions. Their growing constituency -- among the youth and the urban unemployed -- will require that they act as leaders, not only of a political movement but also of the nation. As the role of opposition parties changes, Mission will target its outreach efforts, aiming to instill in this constituency a better understanding of the U.S. and its policies.

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